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AUTHOR	Katch, Jane
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ABSTRACT

Noting that the perception of increased real violence in the country has created an inhospitable setting for pretend violent play, this book recounts the experiences of children in a kindergarten and first-grade classroom over the course of one year, focusing on the role of violent fantasy play. The book illustrates how the teacher, with 8 years of experience working with emotionally disturbed children under the direction of Bruno Bettelheim, empathizes with games such as "Suicide" and helps create a community in which the children's feelings and play can be openly discussed within the context of an ongoing school curriculum. Illustrating the teacher's faith in children's capacity to examine their own feelings, the book uses the students' vocabulary and storytelling to show children's obsessions with violent fantasy play. Dialogues with 9- and 10-year-olds reveal their great interest in talking with an adult about their feelings regarding violent media, their own parents' response, and the roles of anger and social exclusion in violent behavior. The dialogues further reveal that (1) social exclusion can lead to a cycle in which violent behavior is justified, both by the excluded child and by those who exclude him or her; and (2) girls' social exclusion is just as painful as that of boys but is more subtle. Conversations with the kindergartners and first graders suggest that violent images may protect children who feel vulnerable. Even the younger students could develop complex recess rules surrounding violent play that protected everyone, even children who liked violent play. The children could also identify the types of play that made them calm. The book concludes by asserting that it is important to distinguish between pretend violence and behavior that truly hurts or frightens children: pretend violence does not hurt others and has rules that can be negotiated by everyone involved in the game; real violence hurts physically or emotionally, is frightening, and is often closely connected with exclusion. (KB)

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